

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT : Disclosure of Sensitive Intelligence Information

In the past few weeks, there have been some striking public disclosures of sensitive foreign policy issues and NSC deliberations, as well as of highly sensitive intelligence information. In some instances, officials of this government have gone so far as to cite specific intelligence collection capabilities. In other cases, information released on policy has pre-empted my decisions and narrowed my flexibility. Intelligence information has been released that was so specific that any intelligence professional could easily deduce the sources of information. In total, the information and assessments that have appeared in the media give the USSR and other foreign powers substantial insight into our most confidential deliberations and into the capabilities and limitations of US intelligence.

These disclosures must stop. Disclosure of national security and intelligence information threatens the effectiveness of this Administration and the intelligence capabilities of the US. In the area of intelligence it gives our adversaries information that allows them better to conceal their actions from us. In both the policy and intelligence arenas, each revelation of facts inspires new questions and leads to new requests for clarification and elaboration. When closely held information appears in the press only hours after a meeting or dissemination to senior officials, security discipline is undermined at all levels of government. When senior officials are known to be the source of harmful disclosure, they lose the confidence of their colleagues and the respect of their subordinates. Moreover, foreign sources and governments are complaining about our laxness because we are jeopardizing their policy interests and their intelligence activities as well as our own.

It is clear to me that the current problem stems from the pursuit of desirable objectives with an inadequate appreciation of the harm that is being done. We unquestionably need the cooperation and support of our allies on matters related to our mutual defense obligations. It is important that the American public be well informed on subjects of major consequence. But we cannot allow ourselves to satisfy these needs at the expense of the effective formulation of national security policies and of our present and future intelligence capabilities.

In those instances where disclosure of classified information is deemed necessary, I consider each of you personally responsible for ensuring full compliance by your organization with applicable orders and regulations. Any public disclosure initiative by someone in your organization must have your approval. Any disclosure--including release to foreign governments--involving national intelligence assets requires the prior approval of the Director of Central Intelligence as well. The Director is responsible to me for protection of intelligence sources and methods and stands ready to assist you with any additional guidance that is needed.

The time has come to reverse the flood of damaging disclosures of sensitive information. Our national security depends upon this and I intend to fulfill my responsibilities in this regard. I expect each of you to do no less.

Ronald Reagan